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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 VILNIUS 000053

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [AMGT](#) [EINV](#) [LH](#)

SUBJECT: WORKING WITH THE BRAZAUSKAS GOVERNMENT: LOOKING
BACK AND FORWARD

REF: 05 VILNIUS 57

Classified By: DCM Tom Kelly for reasons (b), (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: One year ago, we laid out a plan to strategically engage the newly elected coalition government headed by veteran politician Algirdas Brazauskas (reftel). Despite political tumult within the coalition, we succeeded in enlisting the new government to support key U.S. objectives, especially in mobilizing the government to support the Global War on Terror and to promote democracy in the former Soviet Union. In this message, we revisit our engagement strategy with the GOL; examine our progress; and provide a plan to further advance our bilateral agenda in 2006. End Summary.

2. (C) The Brazauskas government took office in December 2004. A few weeks later, we sent Washington our plan to advance the following key objectives:

- 1) Support for U.S. Initiatives within Europe and beyond
- 2) Support for Democracy at Home and Abroad
- 3) Closer U.S.-Lithuanian Economic Ties
- 4) Bilateral Law Enforcement Cooperation
- 5) Improving Embassy Operating Conditions

3. (SBU) We engaged quickly and intensively with the new government, and on the issues that matter most, we succeeded in making Lithuanian support for U.S. objectives even more stalwart. Ambassador Mull has met with every single Cabinet member, and frequently consults with key decision makers like President Adamkus, PM Brazauskas, Foreign Minister Valionis, and Defense Minister Kirkilas. Mission interactions with government leaders are guided by Ministry-specific work plans that track progress on the issues that matter to U.S. interests.

4. (SBU) In areas such as promotion of U.S. investment, encouraging transparency and tolerance, and cultivating Lithuania's next generation of leaders, however, we think that we can do even better in 2006. Below is our work plan, organized by major policy goal, for the engagement of government leaders and the pursuit of Mission objectives.

Active in Global War on Terror

5. (C) Our preeminent priority in 2005 was to maximize Lithuania's contribution to global peace and security. We enlisted the new government to help us on a number of issues essential to U.S. foreign policy objectives. Little more than a month after it took office, the GOL agreed to lead a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Chagcharan, Afghanistan, a forbidding region that larger NATO allies declined to cover. 121 Lithuanian soldiers have brought security and order to this mountainous region. In Iraq, the new government reaffirmed Lithuania's troop commitment to the multinational coalition in Iraq, and stated publicly that Lithuanian troops will remain on the ground as long as necessary.

6. (C) We aim to build on these accomplishments in 2006 by sustaining and reinforcing public support for Lithuania's participation in these multinational operations. In Afghanistan, we will encourage the GOL to redeploy a Special Forces detachment this Fall. In Iraq, we will encourage follow-through on the Lithuanian commitment to participate in the coalition's burgeoning training mission with Iraqi security forces. We also intend to push for Lithuania's continued development of niche capabilities within NATO, and to work with Parliament to encourage adequate defense spending to pay for them.

Building democracy abroad...

7. (C) The new government also championed freedom closer to home in 2005, reaffirming its predecessors' commitment to the promotion of democracy and Western values within the former Soviet Union. We worked with the Foreign Ministry to organize a meeting in Vilnius between the Secretary, FM Valionis, EU Foreign Affairs Commissioner Solana, and Belarusian opposition groups that was covered by media around the world. We also helped Lithuania plan and carry out a

Defense Ministers' meeting (with Secretary Rumsfeld's participation) to bring NATO members and Ukraine closer together.

18. (C) This year, we will continue to encourage and praise GOL's active role in promoting democratic institutions and human rights in its neighbors in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. Our current focus is working with the GOL to prepare a successful summit meeting of the Communities for Democratic Choice in Vilnius this May; we hope for high-level USG participation. At the same time, we will seek to restrain impulses in some parts of the government to pursue an inappropriate engagement strategy with the Lukashenko regime. At the end of the day, we expect that the GOL will play a constructive role in monitoring the March elections in Belarus and keeping other governments focused on the importance of building democracy there.

...and at Home

19. (SBU) We also have a responsibility to help Lithuania develop a more mature and resilient political system itself. While Lithuania boasts a strong and active democracy, featuring passionate debate, a vibrant media, and a range of competing ideas, the year 2005 also cast light on a few worrisome trends. The year witnessed a troubling media attack on civil society organizations, and Lithuania's enduring struggle with corruption and intolerance remained a source of concern.

110. (SBU) In 2006, we will continue to emphasize these issues by speaking out in defense of civil society and enhancing our anti-corruption training programs. We confronted intolerance in 2005 with a series of public events, and we will intensify our efforts in 2006 by featuring the issue as a core theme of our speeches and outreach programs. We also continued to work closely with the government to encourage the restitution of former Jewish communal property confiscated during the Holocaust. The government is likely to present Parliament with legislation to effect restitution in the next few months.

Developing a Positive Agenda on Visa Policy

111. (SBU) Keeping Lithuania at the frontlines of the global struggle for freedom will require us to remain responsive to the issues about which Lithuanians care. The most prominent in that regard remains the GOL's desire for inclusion in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). In 2005, the GOL and we launched a positive, substantively focused VWP "Roadmap" that reminded Lithuanians of the VWP's substantive requirements. With our encouragement, the GOL took significant steps forward in improving document security and combating fraud. We worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to publicize the Roadmap, and praised the GOL publicly for its tangible steps to satisfy VWP criteria) but also informed the public of the enduring problem of document fraud and visa overstays.

112. (SBU) In 2006, we will continue to highlight these issues actively and publicly. House Judiciary Committee Chair Sensenbrenner's visit here last week got us off to a good start. We will also focus on other priority areas, including our work to press the GOL for improved residency visa procedures for Amcits, and to attract more future Lithuanian leaders to participate in the Summer Work and Travel Program.

Support for Law Enforcement

113. (SBU) The year 2005 saw substantial progress in our efforts to support Lithuanian law enforcement. Just months after Attorney General Gonzalez signed a new extradition treaty with GOL last June, the Brazauskas government extradited a Lithuanian citizen to the United States for the first time. In 2006, we plan to expand our training initiatives with law enforcement officials and the judiciary on intellectual property rights. We will also continue our joint work with the GOL to combat the root causes and mitigate the effects of trafficking in persons.

Promote U.S. Economic Interests

114. (SBU) Our strategy to enlist the new government in our campaign to boost U.S. investment here drew early dividends, as Economy Minister Uspaskich traveled to the United States to woo potential investors. Soon afterwards, Uspaskich became enmeshed in political troubles, and his Ministry's attention to our issues dwindled. In 2006, we will seek to energize his successor and others in the GOL to seek more

American involvement in this dynamic economy. Several Mission-sponsored initiatives, especially a new S&T agreement and pending negotiations with the Interior Ministry to streamline Amcit residency requirements, will support this objective. We will participate in trade and investment conferences focusing on the region, and will work with our partner FCS post in Warsaw to encourage U.S. business visitors to Eastern Europe to include Lithuania in their itineraries. We will also team with U.S. businesses to help them win their share of the commercially significant deals that come up for bid this year.

Effective Embassy Operating Conditions

15. (SBU) In 2005, our collaboration with the new government substantially improved the work environment for the Mission community. Working intensively with the Ministry of Finance, we accomplished a longstanding goal by eliminating GOL taxation of U.S. assistance. We also addressed several issues relating to the diplomatic status of Mission personnel, such as our work with the Tax Inspectorate to establish a more timely system to disburse VAT refunds to American staff. In 2006, we will seek GOL support for further improvements to our living conditions here, including point-of-sale VAT refunds.

Conclusion

16. (C) The new government's first year in office featured considerable political turbulence, but our principal interests here were, if anything, enhanced. Lithuania remains one of our nation's most loyal and consistent allies on issues that matter to us. In the world's most dangerous places, Lithuania stands shoulder to shoulder with the United States. The above work plan outlines our strategy for preserving the strong friendship we enjoy here, for ensuring the continued support of GOL on key foreign policy goals, and for tackling issues of concern that affect U.S. interests in Lithuania. We are proud as a Mission of the significant achievements of 2005, and we remain confident that the strategy outlined here will yield an even stronger and more durable bilateral relationship in 2006.
MULL